

SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE AGRITOURISM PRODUCT'S QUALITY

**Assoc. Prof. Ph.D. Muhcina Silvia,
„Ovidius” University of Constanta
Faculty of Economic Science
Constanta, Romania**

Abstract: Generally, the agritourism is considered as a sector that includes a great variety of tourism services, activities, events, sport, entertainment and even some economic activities, all of them developed on rural farm (on country side). Based on a natural and cultural patrimony, the agritourist product is complex and is the result of some particularly interactions between the rural space, people who lives on this space and the local specific products. The quality of this tourist product is very complex and can be determinate by the junction of some typical characteristics: the natural resources quality, the technical-material basis (guest structure, village structure etc.), the cultural profusion etc.

Key words: marketing, agritourism, quality, products.

Between tourism motivations, the relaxation need in to a natural, agreeable and not polluted environment has a significant position.

In other words, the natural environment and its quality is the fundamental condition to unfold tourism activities (Nistoreanu, etal, 2003, pp. 35).

In WTO acceptance, the rural area tourism is a kind of tourism which includes any tourism activity organized and managed in rural area by the local population, valorizing natural local resources (natural, cultural, historic and human) as well as tourism structures, including lodgings and agritourism guest farms.

Because of the large resources variety that can be used in tourism activity (forests, agricultural areas etc.) there are different ways to express the rural tourism activities and tourism products offered on market.

So, a significant part of these rural tourism activities are found as agritourism, a different type of tourism.

Agricultural tourism, or agritourism, is one alternative for improving the incomes and potential economic viability of small farms and rural communities. Some forms of agritourism enterprises are well developed including fairs and festivals. Other possibilities still offer potential for development.

Agritourism is a recently concept, that refers to different tourism forms, which are in direct connection with agricultural activities and/or the buildings having destinations, role, functions in agriculture domain. This specific type of rural tourism is based on assuring in rural farm frame of accommodation, food and beverages, entertainment and other complementary to them services (Stanciulescu, etal, 1998, pp.6).

Small owners from rural areas (country side) practiced this type of rural tourism, usually as secondary activity (Nistorescu, etal, 2003, pp. 191).

Generally, the agritourism is considered as a sector that includes a great variety of tourism services, activities, events, sport and entertainment, all of them developed on rural farm (on country side).

Agritourism is also considered as a particularly type of tourism, more complex, including the tourism activity its self (accommodation, food, sport, entertainment) as well as economic activity, regularly agriculture, practiced by the tourists hosts, essentially the agricultural products production and trading (Csosz, 1996, pp. 9).

In fact, agritourism describes the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation to enjoy, to be educated or be involved in act and like examples of agritourism it can be mentioned:

- Farm tours for family and school children;
- Day camps;
- Hands-on chooses;
- Self-harvesting of produce;
- Hay or sleigh rides and
- Overnight stays in a bed and breakfast (Ag.MRC, Aug. 2007).

Based on these aspects, the agritourism product can be characterized by some specific features such as:

- Due its nature, the agritourism product is a complex product formed by certain components, one of them assured by the farms (accommodation, breakfast, entertainments) and other that can be assured by other services suppliers (transportation, different types of entertainment etc.);
- The agritourism tourism product involves a direct distribution (direct from the farm) as well as an intermediate distribution;
- Due to its specific attraction, depending on the natural resources the agritourism product is under specific juridical coercions, limits that vary from country to country;
- Because of the necessity of assuring the tourist' satisfaction, the agritourism product has to have certain quality characteristics.

The quality of tourist product expresses the level of concordance between the tourists' expectation and the result of the tourist services and it can be evaluated through at least two categories of: subjective features and objective features, such as:

- Product image features, starting from the way it is seen by tourists on the base of the existent information about the product or based on the tourists' opinions formed on their experience;
- Functional features that give the product need value or utility, in other words, it gives to the product the capacity of fulfilling the need for tourism.

In reality, is very difficult to define and to measure the agritourism' product quality; it can be done using the analysis of some specific characteristics derived from the quality parameters of its components.

In the large sphere of preoccupations concerning the quality of agritourism, we can mention the example of Canadian British Columbia's agritourism' specialist's efforts. To assure a high level of quality they propose The British Columbia Code of Standards, designed to promote growth in British Columbia agritourist industry and "rise the bar" for agritourism across the province.

In 2001, researches founded BCATA developed the Quality Assurance Organization to rise the quality of agritourism products and services in British Columbia.

The Quality Assurance is designed to:

- Increase the quality of agritourism products and services;
- Improve consumer safety and health at agritourism business;
- Enhance our reputation for agritourism experience;
- Strengthen the local, regional and international agritourism markets;
- Increase farmer and consumer awareness of British Columbia;
- Showcase British Columbia as a leading agritourism destination (British Columbia Agritourism Organization, 2005).

Because of its specific, the quality of the agritourist product has to be analyzed in particular way, starting from the fact that rural tourism is based on three coordinates (rural space, the inhabitants and the specific products offered by them) and the accommodation at the farm is the equivalent for a leisure holiday in the village and for spending active time in the rural space. This is why, the analysis of the quality characteristics for this product can be realized using first the specific elements that will determine its substance and provide its content.

Considering these characteristics, can be identified the following aspects:

- Quality characteristics of natural resources such as: the beauty of the landscape, that unique elements that distinguished it or the diversity of elements that compose specific fauna and flora of those places, the intensity of the environment's pollution, the weather condition etc.;
- Quality characteristics of the technical-material base for this certain type of product and that is the quality of the social welcoming structure, specific for the village farms and in general for the villages, the sum and essence of the inhabitant's spirit and traditions;
- Quality characteristics of services: accommodation, food, entertainment (music, fairs, handmade, folk dancing etc.);
- Quality characteristics of promotional activities (advertising, promotion by marketing events etc.).

A special importance for that matter has the nature of services which characterized the village life, the manufacturing activities or the specifically designing activities (wool spinning, weaving, potting etc.) kept in a not modified form, which set the traditions and the local color and which complete the touristy motivation. The tourists' accommodation in the rural medium can be made on a farm or on a villager's household, on a rural hotel or on a rural pension, in a camping space or inside rural villages.

In any way the accommodation is set, these spaces must have the following requirements:

- They have to be built and arranged according to the locals' specific, according to the architectonic features of the zone and the construction material used have to be the traditional ones (a tendency to use the iron plate, aluminum, concrete, glass is likely to be much more used in the rural medium, damaging the natural resources and the specific of the zone creating a harsh impression of a bad-taste which drives the visitors away; considering this point of view it is necessary that the local authorities need to get

involved in a larger way, regarding the warning and stumbling the locals who want to build their houses in a style that does not suit the local stamp and the authorities have to also encourage -through different ways- those who maintain the local area specify;

- The areas have to be cleaned and arranged in such a way in order to create the visitor's comfort, with clean toilettes, bathrooms with hot water at least during certain hours. It's need to be offered to the visitors the possibility of getting involved - if and when they wants to do it- in certain needed housekeeping activities (feeding the animals, haymaking etc.) or, if it's case, in traditionally activities connected with certain holydays (most likely the habits of Easter or Christmas such as: kneading and baking of the sponge cakes, painting the eggs in a traditional local meaner etc.) and carefully leaving the visitors their proper intimate space required for their own spending of free/leisure time;

- The drinkable water has to be in dead drinkable, the products obtained from the peasants houses that are given to the tourists to eat must have to be fresh (as much as possible, the fruits and vegetables have to be ecologically brought up and the meat, the eggs, the milk have to be taken from healthy animals) in order not to be attacked by germs, bacteria or causes disease;

- There has to be a network to collect the garbage, the housekeeping rests. These systems must not interfere with the water bringing pumps, the tourists must not throw the packages (mostly PET) and the food remains in the middles of nature (it is know that their own rude, indecent, noisy behavior lowers the quality of this specific products);

- There have to be transportation means to the accommodation places or the tourists' objectives (historically monuments, religious monuments, cultural monuments etc.) in the area and means of communication (phone, mail).

The hosts' quality, the villagers quality and the quality of peoples' place have could be judged considering the open communication, their kindness, their seriousness and their concern in taking care of the tourists flown from their native features and even from a certain level of knowledge or training in the industry of hospitality gained through different means of teaching. The cultural quality of their ancestors, their traditions and habits kept in their original way across the time, their way of life with archaically elements set on the solar cycles of running time. The quality of the agritourist product could be understood through the augmentation of the prices reflecting the accommodation conditions and the served food, the moral or material efforts of the hosts who try their best to please the tourists. On one hand, these prices have to reward the leisure holyday moments spent by the tourists in a pure, harmonious, free of environments' pollution, with many tradition, unique, specific traditions accompanied by wonderful and welcoming hosts, who offer a place to stay to the tourists, a proper meal and even a part of their spirit (soul) and on the other hand these have to be well put together in order to make the product accessible and affordable for tourists who are mostly represented by family with children who attend schools and with medium income. Actually during the last period, because of the increase of the foreign tourists' interest in some particular areas in our country, areas rich in traditions and popular habits and in which life has an archaic way to development without some urban comfort elements, any use of modern equipments and technologies, it can be seen a increase of the accommodation and meal prices in rural households.

In the same time, the quality of tourists themselves also decides the quality of agritourist product. Picky guests who demand the peasants' hotel-like conditions, a too sophisticated menu or an excessive attention from the hosts are very hard to please and leave without proper satisfaction. Life in the countryside needs a certain amount of simplicity.

As in other situations, the quality of the agritourist product may decrease heavily when increase rapidly the number of tourists, the villages get crowded, and augment the phonic pollution. From the desire of increasing the size of earning, the peasants accommodate more and more tourists, the business "industrialized", the households get more modern, they add new rooms and they build new places to stay in a contrary way to the specific one, decreasing the tourists' attractions to the place.

As it's sad, the tourism is a chance for economy, but can be a risk for nature and society (Nistoreanu, etal. 2003, pp. 22).

The quality of agritourist product can be augmented by implicated the local and central authorities. The decisions to help the peasants' efforts make can mean financial help or tax decrease to the households who accommodate tourists, setting up a consulting service and even starting a system of teaching and training of the people just like the elaboration of future plan of development in agritourism according to the country's economical strategy, the development of the accommodation spaces according to the local specific in order to maintain the culture and the architecture the way they are.

The quality of the agritourist product depends on the efforts consisting in its' national and mostly international promotion and distribution. That is why, for our country, it is necessary the helping hand from the central authorities who have to uniquely coordinate the way the agritourism offer spreads internationally, to intensify the joining activities at showrooms and exhibitions for that matter, to contact important tourism agencies, to draw the interest of those to this particularly form of tourism consisting in a generously offer who characterizes us through our resources, nature of traditions and habits and individualizes us in the world's geographic and cultural space, making us an easier connection through internal and international space, by eliminating human frontiers and the communication barriers.

Agritourism is a growing industry and presents a number of opportunities for farmers. They can sell their agricultural and value added products direct to consumers from an on-farm stand, also known as farm stands, or kiosk located on or near his farm or along a road near the farm.

Through agritourism, people can meet and understand different aspects of different cultural lifestyle, can meet and understand the traditional customs with positive and favourable effects on human relationship.

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